Comments RE: MM Docket No. 99-25 (Creation of a Low Power Radio Service)

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As a potential community broadcaster, I would like to provide comments on the proposed Low Power FM service from my background as a former broadcast engineer (held the old "FCC First Class" license) and as a current amateur radio operator (Advanced Class).

The FCC's proposed power levels, antenna heights and station separation parameters all appear to be based on sound engineering judgment. For LP100 and microstations, the low power levels and small service areas should negate any need for 2nd or 3rd-adjacent channel considerations. While there may be some validity to concerns for LP1000 station 2nd-adjacent channel separation, improvements in receiver technology nullify this concern and the benefits of the new service far outweigh the unlikely exceptions.

However, new LP1000 stations should be required to protect existing co-channel and 1st-adjacent channel LP100 stations.

Channels 201-220 (88-92 MHz) should be reserved for noncommercial educational broadcasters, including community and religious organizations. Channels 221-300 should be available to both commercial and noncommercial entities.

Use of radio broadcast auxiliary frequencies, such as STL needs, should be allowed; this would be especially true for LP1000 stations that may not be able to locate studios near their transmission facilities.

As for future digital services, the more aggressive bandwidth utilization of IBOC by existing broadcasters may be more likely to cause interference to LPFM rather than the reverse. It would appear that some broadcasters are using the "interference argument" as a part of their effort to thwart introduction of a LPFM service.

Proposed transmitter certification, using existing standards with the outlined parameters, would insure correct operation and minimal harmonics. Additional masking or bandwidth restrictions would prove unnecessary given the limited power ranges of the new service. However, sacrificing LPFM subcarriers should not be detrimental to the overall goals of establishing the service.

If necessary, a compromise regarding bandwidth that would not impact transmitter costs could be achieved by limiting the modulating frequencies above 12 KHz. This could be achieved simply by attenuating frequencies over 12 KHz in the audio processing stage, and would still provide acceptable stereo audio fidelity. Indeed, if existing broadcasters experience too many interference

problems with introducing digital services, they may wish to consider such a compromise in their analog service.

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As for programming, LPFMs should be able to use a network service at their discretion. Particularly in a startup mode, a broadcaster may need to rely more on such programming to allow time to develop and increase the level of local programming. After all, in most cases stations will have to develop unique programming in order to attract listeners, and this tendency will translate into local origination.

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No specific regulations regarding public interest programming should be imposed on LP100 or microstations. Similarly, other service rules shouldn't be imposed on the smaller stations.
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LP100 and microstations should be able to renew their licenses at specific intervals (e.g. 8 years). Those who make a concerted effort to serve their community and/or fight against the odds to become commercially successful should not be faced with the risk of losing their license simply because other voices may want the frequency.

Commercial transmitters currently available for a 100-watt facility costs approximately $5,500 and a 30-meter tower costs in the range of $3,000 installed. This means getting an LP100 station on the air can easily cost $10,000 to $12,000, depending on the facilities and other equipment. Broadcasters taking these risks of time and money should not be penalized with uncertainty over being able to keep their license. Unless they have failed to meet stated service requirements, a "renewal expectancy" is most appropriate in this situation.

Electronic filing of applications makes sense, but auctions don't. Bidding by commercial applicants conceivably could exceed construction costs. A lottery method would be preferable, giving small broadcasters the opportunity to put limited resources into their station facilities rather than the rights to a frequency. To resolved mutually exclusive applications, there is merit to the "first-come" processing method during a specified application window.

I appreciate this opportunity to provide comment, and hope the Commission is successful in alleviating some unfounded fears within the broadcast community.

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Cordially,
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Walter Molony